

The Pool of Flame

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

Illustrations by Ellsworth Young

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yond dispute, Sypher was dead. "Poor devil!" muttered the Irishman. . . . "The Pool of Flame!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

For several minutes O'Rourke remained beside the body, making two notable discoveries. For he was quick to note the fact that one of the dead man's hands was tightly clenched, while the other lay half-open and limp. The former was closed upon a leather thong so stout as to resist any attempt to break it by main strength, so firmly held that the murderer had found it necessary to sever it with a knife. The knife itself was there, for proof of this, the sheen of light upon its mother-of-pearl handle caught the Irishman's eye.

Picking it up, he subjected it to a close examination that, however, gleaned no information. It was simply a small pocket penknife, little worn, with blades of German steel. It carried no identifying marks and told him but one thing—that the assassin had been a European; a native would never have bothered with so ineffectual a thing when a sturdy weapon, serviceable alike for offense and defense, would have served its purpose equally well.

From this he turned to the dagger which he had taken from the body; a stiletto with a plain ebony handle, marked, unscratched, apparently with the dealer's showcase. It meant nothing, save that it indicated a more strongly that the murderer was most probably not a native. A week or an Italian, a Genoese sailor or a native of Southern France—say a seafaring man out of Marseilles—might have carried it.

"Oho!" said O'Rourke, speculative. "A Frenchman, mayhap!" He got up, satisfied that he would learn nothing more by continuing his search of the solicitor's body. The mental link between the fact of the crime and its perpetrator was inevitable; O'Rourke believed implicitly that Sypher had been murdered by Des Trebes masquerading as "De Hyeres." And he could have done himself an injury in the impotent fury aroused by realization that he had permitted himself to be so childishly hoodwinked, despite the suspicions he had entertained of the so-called "De Hyeres." He felt himself responsible, since he had neglected to warn Sypher. It had been on his tongue's tip that afternoon, when Sypher himself had diverted the warning by his request that the O'Rourke could more comfortably spin his yarn after they had dined.

"Poor devil!" said the adventurer again. He stooped to spread his handkerchief over the staring, pitiful face. "And poor, poor young woman!" He was startled by the thought of her; for the first time it entered into his comprehension, until then bounded by the hard and fast fact of the murder. Now instantly his concern about the crime was resolved into solicitude for the girl. What could have happened to her? What had become of the servants, whose sudden desertion had left the house so sinisterly quiet?

Swept on by a fever of anxiety on the girl's behalf, O'Rourke glanced quickly about the study to assure himself that he had overlooked nothing of importance, then passed out into the main hall or reception-room. Here the most searching inspection revealed nothing amiss. He moved on to the other room on the main floor and found himself in the dining-room; here again all was in perfect order.

The kitchen offices in the rear of the house next received his attention; he found them completely untenanted, having apparently been abandoned in desperate haste. Everything was in disorder; the meal he had been invited to partake of was cooking to cinders in pots and ovens; a heavy offense of burning food thickened the atmosphere. Half-fuddled, he left the place as quickly as possible, returned to the main hall and ascended to the upper story.

Here he found three bed-chambers and a bath. He first entered Sypher's, then the room evidently occupied by Miss Pynsent, finally what was unquestionably a guest-chamber, discovering nothing noteworthy until he reached the latter. And here he received a shock. Thrown carelessly across the foot of the bed was a woman's evening wrap, while on the bureau were gloves, long, white and fresh, but wrinkled from recent wear, and a silken veil. Plainly these were the property of the fourth guest, whose place had been set at the table below, but of whose identity he had not been apprised. Presumably, he reflected, she (whoever she was) had been intended as the fulfillment of Sypher's hinted surprise.

A guess formed vaguely in his brain, and suddenly curdled into a suspicion.

He took the gloves in his hand, examining them for marks of identification, but found none. But in one corner of the veil he discovered an embroidered initial—the letter B.

"Beatrix?" he guessed huskily. "Is it possible? . . . He promised me a surprise. . . . I would have been like her to plan it with him—and 'tis quite possible she reached Rangoon before I . . . My wife!"

Hastily he returned to the evening wrap, a fascinating contrivance of lace and satin unquestionably the last cry of the Parisian mode, such a wrap as his wife might well have worn. But beyond Paquin's label stitched inside its dainty pocket it boasted no distinguishing mark.

He stumbled hurriedly from the room and down the stairs, returning to the study where Sypher's body lay; tortured by mounting fears, he stood and looked blankly about him, at a loss where next to turn, if almost preternaturally alive to every sound or sight that might afford him a clue. He fought against a suspicion that crawled like a viper in his brain. Had he, after all, been deceived in Sypher's niece, Miss Pynsent? Had that innocent charm of hers been a thing assumed, a cloak for criminal duplicity? Had she in reality been Des Trebes' accomplice? Had those clear and limpid eyes of youth, all through that voyage been looking forward to such a scene, to such a tragic ending as this? Could she have afforded the Frenchman the aid he needed to consummate his chosen crime?

For he was now ready to believe Des Trebes the prime mover in this terrible affair; he no longer entertained a shred of doubt that his enemy had traveled with him from Calcutta under the disguise of "De Hyeres." And he believed the man had planned this thing far ahead; else would he have surely taken some overt step to prevent O'Rourke from delivering the ruby to Sypher. He divined acutely that, despairing of any further attempt to win the jewel from him, Des Trebes had turned his wits to the task of stealing it from Sypher; somebody naturally much less to be feared than the adventurer.

But on the other hand, if the girl had not been Des Trebes' assistant—what had become of her? And what of her guest—the lady one of whose initials was B?

It was not inconsistent with Des Trebes' whole-hearted villainy that he should employ a gang of thugs sufficiently large to overpower and make away with bodily and in a body Miss Pynsent, her guest and the servants. "Great God!" cried O'Rourke. "If it be in truth my wife!"

Without preface a thin but imperative tintinnabulation broke upon the silence of the house of death. O'Rourke jumped as if shot. Somewhere in one of the other rooms a telephone bell was ringing. It ceased, leaving a strident stillness; but before he could move to find the instrument and answer the call, there rose a second time that moaning sob which first he had attributed to an impossible source, then, in the turmoil of his thoughts, had forgotten.

He waited, listening intently. The telephone called again and again subsided. Then a third time he heard the groan, more faint than before, but sufficiently loud to suggest its source. He moved warily toward the windows and out upon the veranda—hounded by the telephone. But that would have to wait; here was a more urgent matter to his hand. Between the long, insistent rings the moaning was again audible; and this time he located it accurately. It came from the lawn, near the edge of the veranda. He stepped off carefully, but almost stumbled over the body of a man who lay there, huddled and moaning. "And another!" whispered the adventurer, awed. "Faith, this Pool of Flame . . .!"

He was at once completely horrified and utterly dumbfounded. Nothing he had come upon within the bungalow seemed to indicate that there had been anything in the nature of a struggle prior to the assassination of Sypher. He had up to this moment considered it nothing but a cold-blooded and cowardly murder; the man had apparently been struck down from behind in total ignorance of his danger. O'Rourke had deduced that Sypher had risen from the deck to put the jewel in his safe; and that while he was so engaged the assassin, till then skulking



Dragged Him into the Library.

outside the long windows and waiting for a moment when his victim's back should be turned, had entered and struck. . . . But how could he reconcile that hypothesis with this man who lay weltering and at the point of death at the veranda edge?

Indeed, he could not do so. But the victim, at least, was not yet dead.

If he had strength to moan, he might yet be revived, at least temporarily.

Without delay, then, the Irishman gripped the man beneath the armpits, and, lifting him bodily to the veranda, dragged him into the library. Not until he placed him in the middle of the floor, beneath the glare of the lamp-light, did O'Rourke have an opportunity to observe his features. But now as he dropped to his knees beside the body, his wondering cry testified to immediate recognition.

The latest name to be inscribed on the long and blood-stained death-roll of the Pool of Flame was that of Paul Maurice, Vicomte des Trebes; or, if there were life enough left in the man to enable him to insist upon his nom de guerre (the wanderer reflected grimly) Raoul de Hyeres.

"What next?" wondered O'Rourke. "What can the meaning of it all be now?"



A Man Stood in One of the Windows.

With each development the mystery was assuming more fantastic proportions, becoming still more impenetrable and unsolvable. But he had no leisure in which to ponder it now, if Des Trebes were to be restored. And O'Rourke worked over the man as tenderly as though they had been lifelong friends, with skillful fingers estimating the nature and extent of his wounds, with sound knowledge of rough and ready surgery doing all that could be done to bring him back to consciousness.

At last Des Trebes sighed feebly; a spot of color, feeble, flicker, evanescent, dyed his cheeks; his breath rattled harshly in his gullet; his eyelids twitched and opened wide. He glared blankly at the face above.

"Des Trebes!" cried O'Rourke. "Des Trebes!" His voice quickened the intelligence of that moribund brain. A flash of recognition lighted the staring eyes. The lips moved without sound.

"Des Trebes!"

"Ah, yes . . . the Irishman . . . the whisper was barely articulate. O'Rourke put to his lips a cup of brandy diluted with a little water. "Drink," he pleaded, "and try to tell me what's happened to ye. Who gave ye these wounds? Try to speak."

"But . . . no . . . I shall not tell."

"But—good God, man! ye've been murdered!"

The white lips moved again; the adventurer bent his ear low to them.

"We . . . have both . . . lost . . . but you . . . your wife . . ."

"My wife!"

In a frenzy O'Rourke resumed his efforts to strengthen the dying man with spirits and water, but Des Trebes, with a final effort, obstinately shut his teeth, moving his head imperceptibly from side to side in token of his stubborn refusal.

So he died, implacable. In death the chiselled features remained set in a smile sardonic and triumphant. Dying, he gave no comfort to his foe. . . .

For a little time longer O'Rourke knelt at Des Trebes' side, watching and wondering. Eventually he sighed heavily, shook his head, shrugged his shoulders and rose. And, rising, he perceived for the first time that he was no longer alone with the dead in that place.

Kneeling in silence by the vicomte's side he had felt then been hidden from the inner doorway to the room by the drapery of the center table. And evidently it was this circumstance which had emboldened a man to slip in from the main hall and approach Sypher's desk at the back of the room.

As O'Rourke appeared he was conscious first of something moving in the room—a movement caught vaguely from the corner of his eyes. Then he heard a stifled cry of fright. He had already his revolver in his hand, so instant had been the obedience of his brain and body to the admonition of instinct.

He swung about with the weapon poised, crying: "Stop!" The other man was apparently trying to escape by the door to the hall, but was much too far from it to escape the threatened bullet. A jet of fire spurted from his hand. O'Rourke heard a crash and clatter of broken window-glass behind him. Without delay or conscious aim he fired and saw, still indistinctly through pungent wreaths of smoke, the figure reel and collapse upon itself.

The man had hardly fallen ere O'Rourke stood over him, with a foot firm upon one arm, while he bent and wrenched a revolver from relaxing fingers. Then, stepping back, he took stock of the murderous-minded intruder, and saw at his feet, writhing, coughing and spitting, a Chinese coolie—a type of the lowest class, his

face a set yellow mask, stolid, unemotional, brutalized. Even then it betrayed little feeling; only the slant set black eyes burned with unquenchable hatred as they glared up at the conqueror. . . . O'Rourke's bullet had penetrated the man's chest; and as he squirmed and groaned through his sharpened teeth of a rat, a crimson stain spread on the bosom of his coarse white blouse.

Wholly confounded, O'Rourke shook an amazed head. A third element had been added to the mystery with no effect other than to render it more opaque and dense than before.

The telephone, its raucous voice now long since stilled, came into his mind, and he was minded to leave the room and find it, to summon aid.

Before he could move, however, a footfall on the veranda startled him, and his ears were ringing with a command couched in terse, curt English: "Hands up!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A man stood in one of the windows, his figure conspicuous against the night in cool white linen of a semi-military cut, his extended right hand training a revolver on the Irishman's head.

"Faith!" cried O'Rourke with genuine relief, "you're more welcome than a snowfall in Hades. Good evening to ye, and many of them."

"Hands up!"

"With all the pleasure in the world." O'Rourke elevated his hands. "I've two revolvers on me person," he volunteered amiably; "before ye go any further ye'll be wanting to take 'em away from me, I'm not doubting."

"From what I see, I quite believe I shall," agreed the Englishman, without relaxing his unprejudiced attitude. "At all events, keep your hands where they are, for the time being. . . . What the deuce does this mean?"

"Tell me yourself and I'll make ye a handsome present," returned the O'Rourke composedly. "I've been adding me wits over it for the last thirty minutes, but neither rhyme nor reason can I read into it. But, see now; would ye mind relieving me of the arsenal I've been telling ye about, that I may rest me arms without fear of being punctured?"

The other laughed shortly and entered the room—a clean-limbed, sturdy, well-set-up boy of four or five-and-twenty, or thereabouts. He possessed, aside from an emphatic and capable manner, good looks enhanced by a wide good-humored mouth.

"You might help me out a bit, you know," said the boy briskly. "You've been so free with your information that I don't doubt you will place me still further under obligation to you by turning your back and depositing your weapons on that table. Of course, I needn't bore ye by remarks upon the folly of false moves."

"I would be quite superfluous," replied O'Rourke, obeying with a fair and easy grace. "There now. What else may be your pleasure?"

"Move back three paces and stand still."

"Right-O, me lord." O'Rourke executed the prescribed evolution and, at rest, heard footsteps behind him; a thought later he felt the Englishman's hands rapidly going

through his pockets. Then, with a "very good," the latter stepped between the table and O'Rourke and faced him.

"You've apparently told the truth thus far," he said. "Now what'd you know about this?" He waved a hand round the room. "Be careful what you say. I may as well inform you I'm Couch, Lieutenant sub-chief of police for this district."

"Saint Patrick would be no more welcome," declared O'Rourke. "I was on the point of trying to get ye by telephone when ye saved me the trouble. How the divil did ye happen to drop in so opportunely?"

"I was coming up-stream in the police launch, on the night tour of inspection, and stopped at the landing just below this—the grounds here run down to the river, you know—to telephone back to headquarters on business. The exchange operator suggested I look in here and see if everything was all right—said he'd been unable to get any response since nightfall. . . . Now?"

Carefully and concisely O'Rourke wove the events of the day into a straight narrative, starting with the delivery to Sypher of the Pool of Flame, touching briefly upon Des Trebes' part—so far as he understood it—and concluding with the death of the coolie. The sub-chief of police eyed him throughout with gravely concentrated interest, nodding his understanding.

"I see," he said slowly. "You make it clear enough. Moreover, you've convinced me. I didn't really believe from the first you'd had any hand in this ghastly mess, but I couldn't take chances, of course. You're at liberty to take up these pistols as soon as you please; in fact, I advise you to do so immediately. From what's taken place already, you may have need of 'em within the next ten seconds."

Now for this coolie. If he's able to speak, I'll get some information out of him."

"Too far gone he is, I'm fearing."

"We'll soon find out." The Englishman bent over the man, who was now very quiet, but by the constant flicker of his sunken eyes, still conscious. A hasty examination told the investigator all he needed to know about the nature of the wound. "He'll not last long," said Lieutenant Couch, and began to converse with the local vernacular of Pidgin-English, about a word in ten of which was intelligible to O'Rourke. As he continued to speak

the coolie's scowl darkened and he interrupted with a negative motion of his head. The sub-chief repeated his remarks with emphasis. For reply he got a monosyllabic that sounded, as much as anything else, like an oath. Couch looked up. "He says he wants water, and I suspect he won't speak until he gets it. Can you?"

O'Rourke fetched the half-empty can and Couch put it to the coolie's lips, permitting him to drink as much as he liked. But as soon as the bottle was removed the fellow shut his mouth like a trap and refused a word in answer to the lieutenant's demands and persuasions.

"Stubborn brute," growled Couch. "Most of these animals here belong to some devilish tong or other, and they'd rather die than say anything touching on the business of the society or affecting the interests of a brother-member. But I think I know a way to bring him to reason. Hand me that knife, please."

Wondering, O'Rourke tendered him the weapon that had brought death to Sypher. The lieutenant wiped it cautiously on a corner of the coolie's blouse and held the keen shining blade before his eyes, accompanying the action with a few emphatic phrases. A curious expression, compounded of sullen fury and abject panic, showed in the Chinaman's eyes, and his lips were as if by magic unsealed. However reluctant, he began to chatter and spoke at length, delivering himself of a long statement which Couch punctured now and again with pertinent, leading questions.

At length, throwing aside the knife, he jumped up, strong excitement burning in his eyes. "I've got enough from him," he said rapidly. "I'll explain later. You'll help of course; your wife's involved as well as Miss Pyn-

Other chapters of this highly interesting story will appear next issue. Watch for them

SHERIFF'S SALE

Meyers, Bowman Hat Co

vs.

William Parker etc,

also

Smith, Riley and Company

vs.

William Parker etc.

I, S. H. Jones, sheriff of Knox County, will on Monday April 8th, 1912 between the hours of 10 a. m. and 2 p. m. at the front door of the courthouse in Barbourville, Ky., sell at public outcry, to the highest and best bidder on a credit of six months with good security, a certain tract of land lying on the road fork of Stinking Creek in Knox County, Ky., and bounded and described as follows; beginning at an ash standing on the east side of the county road leading up the road fork of Stinking Creek being a corner of land owned by W. H. Broughton and John Jackson; thence with the meanders of a spur and W. H. Broughton's line n 50 w 26 poles to a red oak n 71 w 20 poles to a stake on said spur n 75 e 38 poles to a red oak n 49 w 16 poles to a stake on said spur n 74 w 24 poles to three small chestnuts W. H. Broughton's corner on top of the ridge between road fork and Anderson fork of Stinking Creek pointed by a black standing s 30 w 40 links; thence with the top of said dividing ridge s 47 30 w 20 poles to 5 hickories s 37 w 8 poles to a stake s 27 w 12 poles to a chestnut oak and locust on a high knob and rocky place; thence down a spur on the main ridge s 35 e 12 poles to a stake s 21 e 9 poles to a black oak s 49 e 12 6-10 poles to a black gum n 83 30 e 10 2-15 poles to a chestnut oak and rock on agreed corner made between parties hereto; thence with an agreed line between the parties 49 1/2 e 16 poles to a stake in a drain; thence with said drain s 43 30 e 12 poles s 32 e 12 pole, to a stake in said drain; s 37 e 8 poles to a stake in said drain; s 50 1/2 e 12 poles to a small ash on the west bank of the creek; thence with said creek with its meanders to a stake; thence n 50 w 2 poles to the beginning. Book 22 page 152, levied upon as the property of Milton Jackson March 2, 1912.

Said levy and sale are under and by virtue of execution No. 3587 and 4580 which issued from the office of the Knox Circuit Court on Jan. 29, and March 6th, 1912.

The amount of money to be raised is \$224.41 with legal interest from the 25th day of October, 1911, and sum of \$45.00 for cost.

S. H. JONES, S. K. C.

Character the Great Requisite.

Character, as an element of success in life, tells more than knowledge.

SHERIFF'S SALE

The National Bank of Jno. A. Black,

vs.

J. E. Golden and Wm. Golden, etc.

I S. H. Jones, sheriff of Knox county will on Monday the 8th day of April 1912, it being the first day of Knox Circuit Court; between the hours of 10 a. m. and 2 p. m. at the front door of the courthouse in Barbourville, Ky., sell at public outcry to the highest and best bidder on a credit of six months, with good security, the following described tracts of land or so much thereof to pay the debt and cost. FIRST TRACT beginning on a chestnut standing near the road leading from the Thomas Hall house to Barbourville; thence n e down the hill to the mouth of a small ravine below the coal bank; thence with said stream to S. P. Kelley's line; thence with Kelley's line e to John Stammers corner and with Stammers line to an Indian mound on top of the hill; thence n w with the meanders of the ridge to the Peter Wilson line; thence s with said Wilson's line to W. B. Anderson's corner; thence s 42 w 50 poles to a stake on W. B. Anderson's line; thence s 48 e 136 poles to a chestnut tree; thence in the same direction to a branch; thence with said branch to a popular tree on a line between C. Harrison and J. M. Dishman; thence to the beginning. This deed will be found recorded in Deed Book M at page 52.

SECOND TRACT beginning at a stake, a corner of the W. B. Anderson tract on a line between what was once the land of C. Harrison and James Dishman; thence s 42 w 50 poles to a stake and corner on said line sold by M. Eve and others to W. B. Anderson; thence s 48 e 136 poles to a chestnut tree another corner of W. B. Anderson; thence in the same direction to the first branch; thence with said branch to a popular tree on the line between C. Harrison and Jas. M. Dishman; thence with said line to the beginning, containing 50 acres more or less. This land was deeded to Wm. Golden by W. R. Hall & Co., and is found recorded in Deed Book No. 7 at page 297.

Said levy and sale are under, and by virtue of execution No. 3590 which issued from the Knox Circuit Court on the 6th day of March, 1912. Amount of money to be raised is \$100.00 with interest from the 12th day of Jan., 1911, and the sum of \$25.00 cost. Levied on as the property of Wm. Golden, this March 19th 1912.

S. H. JONES, S. K. C.

COMMISSIONER'S SALE

KNOX CIRCUIT COURT

Perry Cole

vs.

Gordon and Julia Parker, depts.

Under a judgement rendered in the Knox Circuit Court at its January term 1912 in the above styled case the undersigned Master Commissioner, will on Monday April 8th 1912, it being first day of Circuit Court day for Knox County, between the hours of 10 o'clock a. m. and 3 o'clock p. m. at the front door of the courthouse in Barbourville, Ky., sell on a credit of six months the following described land or so much thereof to raise the sum of \$687.63 and cost \$55.00 the land will be sold to the highest bidder, and the purchaser will be required to give bond with approved security bearing interest from date of sale and having the force and effect of a judgement with a lien retained upon said property until paid in full said tract of land is situated lying and being on Stony Fork of Little Poplar Creek in Knox County and bounded as follows:

Beginning on a willow at the branch on the side of the road same being a conditional line made between S. S. Parker and J. D. Parker running thence s 80 n 4 poles to a stake; thence n 40 e 50 poles to a walnut and black oak; thence n 8 w 24 poles to a stake; thence e 70 n 33 poles to a stake; thence s 9 w 78 poles to a stake; thence n 55 e 18 poles to a stake; thence north with the road to the Mary Parker line; thence with said Mary Parker line to Thos. Prichards line to a white oak and hickory; thence with Prichards line to a chestnut oak corner of S. S. Parker; thence s. 38 e 80 poles to the beginning.

Given under my hand this March 4th 1912.

J. R. JONES, Commissioner.